

Synodality Listening Session 5 Comments

April 2, 2022

Carmelite Sisters of Baltimore

My dream is that the church is more open and willing to address the issues of human sexuality, family life, and human relationships so that young people come back to the church.

My dream is that we welcome all and not judge.

My dream is that the church is open to hear the equal voice of women and married people on issues of human sexuality, family life, and human relationships.

The church needs to be aware that issues of power and sexuality are keeping people away from the church. My dream is that there is an end to the priests' men club. We need married women theologians to have a voice on issues about family and sexuality.

The church needs to recognize that abortion is a health care issues. The church needs to be wary of leaders saying, "We can't talk about..." In order to be a welcoming and transformative church, we need to be willing to listen, talk, pray, meditate, contemplate, heal, and be changed to be more Christ-like.

My dream is that all who are called to serve are able to fulfill their vocation. The church needs to realize that there is no shortage of vocations. It is the Church systems that are preventing men and women from their call.

My dream is for an inclusive church. This dream leads me to ask the question, how can we be a church that is more loving, more inclusive, and who wants to be in relationships with others and God?

My hope is that we do not put all our trust in Women Ordination. My dream is that we find a way to live out the overarching patrol principles for living well together in Christ.

My hope is that the Catholic Church recognizes that other Churches are also dealing with similar issues and possible work together. Would it be possible to develop a Confederation of Churches to identify a united way to address these issues?

One possibility is to look for the common take-aways from each of these perspectives.

Would it be possible to set aside hierarchy as a way to engage in dialogue?

In honoring these different perspectives it is important to keep in mind the balance between the individual and the common good.

We must consider how our individual actions impact and affect the common good.

We must continue to talk, listen, learn, search, and discover ways to be more open to growing, changing, and developing in order to meet the needs of the whole person, family, community, and the world. We need to be an educated and spiritual church that is open to change.

Clericalism/culture of silence creates abuse, afraid to speak.

Connection between power in the church and sexuality: Power structure in the church needs to change.

How to change mindset of clergy?

Until we address some of the wrong, it will not go away.

Hear people's stories.

Hope in personal relationships between LGBTQ community and heterosexual parishioners to get to know one another better. Someone shared that she was invited to supper by a gay couple and how important this encounter has been for her.

Loving, inclusive church does not translate yet beyond women circle

(i.e., Carmelite sisters of Baltimore).

I wanted the church to change so badly, but that would take the responsibility away from me. No expectation of a huge change, but expectation of myself as I am part of this church.

Personally encourage outsiders to come inside.

Create a framework of Adult Faith Education.

Hopes that the church position would evolve more quickly to be aligned with the understanding gained from science, psychology, and sociology.

Hopes that the church will take a more pastoral [not rule-based] approach to human sexuality and will recognize the oppressive things that people carry from church rules.

Hopes that the church will offer ethics based guidance for relationships; will emphasize the primacy of the well-formed conscience, will teach conscience formation, not rules

Hopes that the church will reconsider the rule that denies communion to folks who are not married in the church

Hopes that the church will undertake the task of educating its personnel and members about human sexuality so that everyone can be more accepting of ‘the other’.

Hopes that just as Jesus made a space, the church will make a space for ‘the other’ so that all will feel welcome. It is encounter that stretches our boundaries. Hopes that the Synod will also make a space for these encounters to happen.

Recognizes that the path forward to women’s ordination is not clear, but hopes that the church will open up the diaconate to women and move away from stereotypical gender requirements.

Hopes that the things surfaced in these meeting will be listened to at the local level.

As in most other conversations, the comments and “dreams of” the participants focused on a Church that is welcoming, non-judgmental, person-centered (not instantly dogmatic), meets and accepts persons as and where they are.

Want a church less locked in its own (sometimes arthritic) views and more informed by science, human development, personal experience (especially of persons primarily male clerics).

Hope for a Church willing to listen without defending or dismissing challenges, criticisms, or loyal dissent.

Include currently missing voices shaping Church’s positions, policies, ethics, morality:

- o Women
- o LBGTQ community
- o Survivors of abuse, trafficking
- o Communities of color

The language of the Church can be so unconsciously dismissive and hurtful – e.g., that persons who are gay and lesbian are “intrinsically disordered.” Who says this stuff?

I Dream of a Church that...

- While treasuring its rich heritage and solid Catholic Social Teaching, is also learning from, and being shaped by, evolving theological, ethical, moral, psychological understanding
- A Church that is not obsessed with procreation but also recognizes the how generativity in the context of loving, caring relationships also nurture life.
- Begins its response to any person from a position (like Jesus) of relationship, love, respect, and treat-

ing with dignity, as modeled in the story of the accused woman brought to him.

- Does not see “sin” always in sexual terms – but recognizes the worst sins are those of exploitive, abusive, depersonalizing and life-damaging treatment of persons as objects
- Learns to live in ambiguity, rather than in either-or / write-wrong / good-bad boxes. Hold the tensions rather than condemning and labeling to “resolve” an issue.
- Returns to its traditional and long-held appreciation of the “internal forum” of conscience, and the proper formation of conscience as primary and sacred responsibilities of persons – including responsible dissent

Primary hope is for inclusion of ALL persons regardless of sexual orientation.

Inclusion of wide theological, psychological, developmental, pastoral perspectives in understanding issues of sexuality.

Hope leadership will accept as “settled” that official teaching on contraception I hold no authority for most Catholics because it is based on assumptions that have been critiqued even by conservative theologians of Vatican II.

Hope leaders will face their evident FEAR about sexuality and fear of changing teaching and pastoral practice on divorce.

Remember LOVE drives out fear.

Completely revise Diocesan seminary education , pastoral practice to include women faculty and students.

Form in the church a Research Institute (Science and Theology) on human sexuality with widely representative group. Church and theology must listen to science in regard to human sexuality.

Memory: Book on sexuality put out by CTSA many years ago (1970s): rejection by Rome.

The Church is called to an “intellectual divestment” in this area, a self-emptying (Philippians) for the sake of new life.

The hierarchical church needs to trust the people of God, listen to them, be attentive to the *sensus fidelium*. Trusting the prayer experience of people to discern, not the catechism, and encouraging education for contemplation out of which people will discern wisely guided by the Spirit.

Enormous power dynamics are at work in the Church in relation to human sexuality.

The people in so many areas of life have suffered because of these dynamics.

Model Jesus, be non-judgmental leaders.

Do what Jesus does in this gospel with the woman taken in adultery.

Don't come ready to hurl stones.

Create a kind of space for people as Jesus did.

Experiences of exclusion are manifold; the desire for inclusion perhaps the highest issue and concern of our synodality sharing.

It is a heresy to say that women cannot represent Christ.

Help students, young women and men to meet Jesus. Realize many of them have no difficulty with LGTBQ.

Themes:

Child sexual abuse: Rampant examples of child sexual abuse by priests significantly decreases the Church's

credibility, especially when it comes to issues of sexuality. This is a very serious example of abuse of power.

Women in Leadership: The importance of having women at all levels of leadership in the Church. Will women be present at the Synod? More women attend church than men, but women have less influence at critical levels of decision in the Church.

From the perspective of Religion: Instead of focusing on dogma and morality, compassionate listening to the people of God would be a better way for the Church to relate to the people and bring them closer to God. One never knows the burden of the other. Religion shouldn't get in the way of one's relationship with God. Vatican II and at least one encyclical has discouraged a one-size-fits-all religion full of rules and encouraged all members of the Church to practice discernment. More instruction along these lines would be helpful rather than more rules. Sacraments shouldn't be used as weapons; e.g., you can't go to communion if . . .

From a psychological perspective: Men have more trouble with sex than women. The more afraid a person is of his/her own sexuality, the more that person tries to control the behavior of others. Men seem to listen in ways different from women which is why it is important to have both voices in the Church. Also, the Church should stay out of the bedroom!!! The psychological formation of priests, at least in the past, leaves something to be desired. Celibacy requires a kind of maturity that hasn't always been nurtured in our priests.

From a historical perspective: Women showed leadership in the early Church; the topic of homosexuality was treated in the early Church; women dressed like men so they could enter monasteries and do tasks only men were allowed to do. These issues are not new!!!

Changing our images of God to a healthier one: The Catholic Woman Priest movement uses non-gender language in its rituals and sacraments, helping to change our images of God from masculine, western, culture-bound, etc. References to the Divine Feminine in Proverbs supported by religious art and music could make a difference in the way we relate to God. Retreats and reading circles can help to stimulate this kind of understanding.

What we can do: Keep nudging!

An overall theme: Once women can exert more leadership in the Church, these issues will begin to change for the better.

There was also a common need for Church structures to have major improvements of Inclusivity. This should start at the roots of structures , hierarchy, liturgy and most important , education . Look around your churches and ask is it inclusive...are all persons made to feel welcome.

As we listened to one another there was an overarching desire for major change within our Church. We need to learn from each other the special gift of experiencing the differences we have and the sameness have. Do we truly know what the other person experiences? How they hear what is being said.

The biblical roots of Church began in personal story telling . Jesus gave us examples of true listening to the other person. He showed no condemnation but a compassionate opening up the hearts of others for a desire to love self and one another.

One participant expressed a fear of her unknowingly being myopic about her Church. A Church with too many rules These rules are not working. The Church is not life giving to all.

Change of any kind is risky and produces fear. The exercises and dialogue within the synodality groups at Carmel are contagious. We listen and have learned from one another.

Several persons shared their personal pain of family members being shun by the church , or denied sacraments or marriage celebrations within the church.

We must teach the heart to listen. Can we as a Church truly actively listen to one another?

Can we promote Love before law?

One participant shared in France there is no issue with the LGBT community as it is in the USA.

Should our round table listening include persons of different cultures also.

What will this effort of Synodality bring to Church and its change in 5 years from now and what small but powerful transformations are happening now?

We have a tendency to listen and hear the communications of others within our own very personal interruption of what is being shared. How do we know what is being said without dialogue about it?

It is challenging to capture in words the passion and reverence and heart felt emotions regarding the Synodality process. All are most grateful to Carmel and to one another. The discussions have given courage to continue conversations

There are currently no avenues to share about a priest who is rigid and doing harmful things that are not sexual abuse.

Growing in trust with other women is a strike against patriarchy.

We all (especially Religious and priests) must be in touch with our own sexuality. Is this taught, examined in the seminary or religious formation?

Every current teaching on sexuality must change. They are laughable.

I think it is good that young people live together before marriage. It is helpful to get to know one another.

We need to accompany people and not condemn them.

The overall problem is with the patriarchal system. Clericalism is killing the Church. What are these little men so afraid of? And how can we take them seriously after the abuse crisis. You want to condemn someone who is divorced and remarried after that?

Must look at all these issues pastorally and not condemning. No two circumstances are the same.

One older married woman shared (in tears) that she had 3 children in the first 2 1/2 years of marriage and decided to use contraception after that. They could not afford more children and were struggling. She still feels guilt about it and has not shared this with anyone before today.

“We were told that the sexual act is not beautiful and we fell for it.”

Fear is the motivation for the faith of so many. They think they are going to Hell if they do not obey the rules. The younger generation doesn't want to participate in a rule-based Church.

Pope Francis is trying to get people to grow up.

People need to be taught to discern for themselves/use their conscience. This is a part of Catholic teaching that is never talked about. This is my dream that our own conscience will be respected. This doesn't mean “anything goes,” it is something that can be taught.

Values have shades of gray to be interpreted; it is ongoing. Cannot just consult a rule-book for every situation. We are more complex than that.

I am so tired of the blatant hypocrisy - a priest or bishop will nit-pick over divorce but not take responsibility for the abuse crisis, cover up. It is ridiculous. It makes the Church a laughing-stock.

Can the Church accompany us when we make mistakes or are struggling. We were taught. only about sin, so it is hard to come to a priest when we are struggling to decide what to do.